

INTERVIEW

Burke: our task is to announce Christ and defend the faith

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"The working document for the Amazon Synod is totally unacceptable, we must do everything we can to defend the integrity of the Catholic faith." "It is also dishonest to present a Synod supposedly for the evangelisation of the Amazon, when the true objective is to revolutionise the whole Church." These are statements by Cardinal

Raymond Leo Burke from the United States in an interview with the Nuova Bussola Quotidiana. He will hold the main lecture at the Giornata della Bussola, 6 October, at the Shalom-Queen of Peace Community in Palazzolo sull'Oglio (Bs). "To the ends of the earth" is the theme of the Day, and it is precisely this theme of evangelisation which leads us to the beginning of this interview.

Your Eminence, today it is very common for Catholics to be told they should witness their faith in Christ basically by doing good and being good, perhaps by helping the poor and immigrants. What do you think?

Let me answer by recalling St. Peter Claver, a Spanish Jesuit who for over forty years, in the seventeenth century, was a missionary in Cartagena, Colombia, for the slaves deported from Africa. When the large ships full of slaves arrived, he was there to heal their wounds, but he also taught them prayers to say because he believed that the most important gift he had to give was faith.

Is it important to avoid proselytising?

Proselytism means to impose your doctrine on others or to make becoming a member of the Church the condition for receiving material aid. This is certainly not correct. But we cannot neglect to announce Christ to those who do not know him and we cannot fail to demonstrate the beauty of the Church. This leaves the interlocutor perfectly free, but he receives the testimony. I'm reminded of the story of an Islamic immigrant who met a young Catholic and after talking about their faiths, was so impressed by a God that is close to His people, the contrary to what is lived in Islam; he asked to be baptised. Jesus Christ is the only saviour of the world and if we proclaim Christ, people will be interested. If we do not mention Christ and if we do not say that our love comes from Him, nourished by the Eucharist, why would anyone think to ask us about Him? The Lord instructed us to go forth into the whole world to baptise all peoples, it is very clear, this is our task.

Today, the general emphasis tends towards appreciating different cultures and religions; missionaries need to listen and when they arrive they should start by learning from what native people have to say. Do you agree?

If a missionary starts with the sole intention of appreciating whatever culture he finds, then we can be sure there will be no evangelisation, it's more likely that these missionaries will end up losing their faith. What's more, there is nothing new about this approach. Once, when I was a young priest, a parish priest asked me to attend a meeting with a missionary from Africa. I was shocked when he said that in his three years of mission, he had never celebrated Mass once, rather he was still appreciating

the local people and becoming a deeper part of their lives. Unfortunately, these are not isolated cases.

This brings us to the next question on the Amazon Synod. The preparatory document (Instrumentum Laboris) echoes precisely this approach, and worse still. You and Monsignor Athanasius Schneider have published an appeal for prayer and fasting so that the errors and heresies in this document are not approved by the Synod. Can you explain?

We must pray and fast for the Church because we are in a moment of profound crisis. We must do everything we can to defend the integrity of the Catholic faith. This document cannot be accepted. The truth of Christ is being challenged, when it is stated that these pagan cultures are in anyway sources of revelation that warrant respect in themselves even though they are outside the context of God's plan which is only fulfilled by Christ's Incarnation. According to the profoundly mistaken view of the Instrumentum Laboris, Christ and the cosmos are one and God also reveals himself in other circumstances. This view is closely connected to pantheism. Therefore it is a cult of the natural world. But the only cult for us is divine worship and it is through this worship offered to God, that God teaches us and we can understand what is the correct relationship with nature and with ourselves.

What about the problem of the meaning of priesthood?

Without doubt, the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ is put into question here. Out of respect for these indigenous cultures, it is claimed that ministries can be shared by various people taking turns. Then there is the attack on celibacy, which is of Apostolic origin and constitutes above all a theological good, meaning to belong totally to Christ, to be with Christ to participate in his priestly office.

The priest is called to celebrate the Eucharist, to offer himself as victim for the salvation of souls, to give himself totally to Christ. This is what is essential, all the other priestly activities - teaching, assisting the faithful in difficulty, charitable work, even the defence of the Indians - are a consequence and even if they were unsuccessful, this would not take anything away from the ministry. When a priest arrives, he brings a special grace, because he is sacramentally configured to Christ our High Priest. People of faith know this very well and appreciate it.

Is the excuse about the decline in vocations valid?

Those who are promoting a "new Church" do not want vocations, they discourage them in order to justify their own position which attacks celibacy. It is no coincidence that the religious institutes, perhaps with young congregations and many vocations, are the ones

being particularly targeted at the moment. There is a video currently circulating of a well-known Italian religious figure who speaks of "the end of a Church of priests" and of new models of ministry. This is exactly what they want, but this is a Protestant approach. Moreover, it is not true there are no longer vocations. What is lacking in many places is an apostolate for vocations and prayer for vocations. When I was a diocesan bishop in the United States at every meeting with priests, I reminded them of the apostolate for vocations. Once, a priest at the end of my presentation to a group of priests, told me: I will never encourage a young man to become a priest until the Church allows women to the priesthood and abolishes celibacy for priests. Here we have the problem.

What about those who plan to make the Amazon Church a paradigm for the universal Church?

This raises another important point. This very dishonest attitude reveals a spirit of worldliness. The Synod is presented as being for the pastoral care of the people to be evangelised in the Amazon, but the German bishops state clearly that the goal is to revolutionise the whole Church, which is certainly not God's plan but a kind of ideology. Even the bishop of Essen, Monsignor Franz-Josef Overbeck, said very recently that after the Amazon Synod "nothing will ever be the same again" in the Church.

Talking about revolutions in the Church, from time to time your name is mentioned among the "enemies" of Pope Francis. You are often connected to Steve Bannon and, more generally, to rich Americans, worried about the criticism of capitalism, and therefore engaged in a conspiracy to "change the Pope", as described in a book recently published in France and handed to the Pope during his recent trip to Africa. What do you have to say?

When they reproach me for being an "enemy" of the Pope, I always ask for just one occasion to be mentioned, when I presumably attacked Pope Francis. Defending the integrity of the Catholic faith cannot certainly be seen as an attack on the Pope, if we are clear about what the Pope means for the Church. As for the rest, it's all nonsense. Speaking of Bannon, I have met him a couple of times, like many other public figures. Recently, I publicly distanced myself from an international association, born to help the European parliamentarians act in accord with the Social Doctrine of the Church, because it was becoming gradually closer to the political activity of Bannon. Bannon even wanted to make a film about the book "Sodom" by Frédéric Martel, who wants to show that the Church is a band of hypocrites and that the cardinals are almost all homosexuals. But I have to teach the faith, defend the faith, I cannot be involved with people who act to destroy the Church.

What about the American capitalists?

There is no plot. It is obvious that in any free society, there is the freedom for all to express their opinions and needs. Among the rich, there are also Catholics who make many sacrifices for the Church. They might say what they think, but they are not a gang against Pope Francis and certainly I am not their guru, as some like to suggest.

These are turbulent times for the American Church, is it true the McCarrick affair has not yet been digested?

In the United States, the McCarrick case is still open because light has never been shed on who protected and promoted this cardinal; from the beginning of his priesthood, he abused young people. Despite this, from a priest he became a bishop, then he was promoted to a more important diocese, to finally become cardinal: there is a rational explanation for all this. And if you do not face up to it, if you do not shed light on how it happened and on those responsible, people are obviously disappointed and disoriented. The worst thing is that the faithful have lost faith in their bishops. For me it has always been edifying to see that even after the first scandal in 2002 people still loved their priests, but now trust in bishops is at an all time low. The bishops had the situation of the abusive priests to manage, and suddenly the shocking case of McCarrick broke out: not only did he commit these crimes but he was promoted time and time again, it is incredible.

In this regard, there is a fundamental problem to which I am very sensitive. I have heard and am still hearing today that canon law was not able to deal with these cases. But this is false, canonical procedures did already exist for these cases: when accusations were made, a preliminary investigation was obligatory, after which, based on what that revealed, it was decided if a judicial or administrative trial should or should not take place. Unfortunately, when accusations were made, instead of following Church procedure, the bishops attempted to take matters in to their own hands. This is always a mistake, so the bishops ended up protecting priests who have committed terrible acts of sexual abuse.

(Translated by Patricia Gooding-Williams)

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